



WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL OVERVIEW

Chiranjit Ray

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Santipur College, Santipur, Nadia, West Bengal

ABSTRACT

In social, political, and economic spaces, education empowers people to claim their rights and fulfil their full potential. As a basis for life in all its facets, education is crucial. Thus, education ought to be a fundamental component of any plan to combat the pervasive gender-based discrimination against all people in our society. Since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), "education for all" has been acknowledged. The principle of equal rights to excellent quality, free, and essential primary education has been maintained by every major international human rights convention. Regarding all the rights, the right to education (for females) is one of the most significant since it helps women and girls achieve other rights. In India, there was a special place for women in society. They relished the high status and freedom of society. Women received the same treatment as men in terms of social standing and prestige. In the early Vedic era, most of the women were educated and made significant contributions to society. Women could freely choose their groom and that was called 'Swayambar'. In Vedic India, the traditions of forced widowhood and the marriage of children were unusual. They were treated to with respect and devotion and to participate in Vedic and sacrifices and utters mantras.

KEYWORDS: Women, Education, India, UDHR, Free, Mantra, Philosophy, Society.

INTRODUCTION

The improvement of living standards in India is principally attributed to the education of women in that nation. Higher rates of female literacy encourage and promote children's education, particularly for female children, and lower the infant mortality rate, which enhances quality of life both within and outside the home. Many studies have demonstrated that lower rates of female literacy are associated with increased rates of childbirth and infant death, inadequate nutrition, reduced earning capacity, and a lack of capacity to make decisions for one's family and society. The Vedic period was unlike any other period in history in terms of the position and conditions of women and girls. There were no restrictions or limitations placed on women who wished to seek higher education and knowledge, especially if they did so without getting married. The majority of girls from wealthy households also had the opportunity to further their studies. Both boys' and girls' initiation ceremonies, or Upanayanas, were planned. It is true that women's education was not neglected during the Aryan period, also known as the poetical age. They were concerned about the propriety of women's social order and never showed bias against women who pursued higher education. The Vedas make it abundantly evident that the Aryan people as a whole were keenly aware of the need to raise the status of women and to enact rules and regulations. It made a significant contribution to the general public's collective creative forces. The fundamental reason why Aryans were unaware of or indifferent to gender power politics and disputes at that period was that society was still in its infancy and was not very complex.

During the Vedic era, there were a lot of female intellectuals

who were knowledgeable about sacred literature like the Vedas. These women studied music and dance in addition to writing hymns. The ladies from lower social classes learned needlework, spinning, and weaving. Women were shrewdly split into two classes by the Vedic educators: Brahnavadinis and Sadyodvahas. The Brahnavadinis were people who studied philosophy and theology all their lives. Sadyodvahas used to pursue their education up until their marriage at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Many educated women went on to become Upadhyayinis, or teachers. During the Vedic era, there were numerous female poets and philosophers. In the Vedic era, there were numerous wise and competent women such as Apala, Ghosha, and Visvavara. These women composed mantras and were considered to be rishis or sages. Along with the philosopher Agasthya, Lopamudra, one of the female preachers of the Vedic era, is said to have preached up to 179 songs from the first book of the Rig Veda. Consequently, it can be claimed that women were afforded the same opportunity as men to demonstrate their aptitude and intelligence in the classroom, in addition to in any other area of social mores and rituals. Women were engaged in religious rituals and sacrifices with their husbands even in pre-Vedic times. Girls and women were forced to recite "mantras," or verses, as part of their formal education in order to improve their ability to pronounce verses correctly and with great clarity. Throughout the Vedic era, numerous female intellectuals overcame numerous social barriers. They had overtaken men in their respective academic domains and were on par with men in terms of education during the Vedic era. During this time, some of the most well-known scholars were Apala, Atreyi, and Ghosha.

During that time, special teachers were appointed by affluent families primarily to teach a variety of arts, including manufacturing toys, painting, sewing, patching, magic, dance, music, etc. Young females could pick up the teachings being taught to younger pupils just by listening in on the homes of intelligent individuals. Thus, it can be concluded that women held positions of more authority and honour in Vedic society. They took part in societal sacrifices, home rituals, and feasts with their husbands. As a result, social relationships were upheld with charity and mutual spirit, and moral conduct in society was of a relatively high standard.

Women education in ancient India:

Women had access to education during the Vedic Period, but this privilege was gradually taken away from them. Many female sages and seers are mentioned in the Indian scriptures, the Rig Veda and Upanishads. In early Vedic times, women had equal status and rights. But about 500 B.C., women's status began to deteriorate. In ancient India, women had a crucial role. Women were widely educated in ancient India during the Vedic era. It was once believed that Indian women were superior to men. The status of women in ancient Indian civilization was highly valued, and they occupied a significant position. The educational system was well advanced during the Vedic era.

Throughout history, women have bravely and enthusiastically participated in every aspect of life. There are many tales of highly advanced and intelligent ladies in Indian mythology. The first written records of education in ancient India date back to the third century B.C., at which time many female academics participated in oral instruction. As Buddhism expanded throughout India, renowned educational establishments like Takshila, Vikramshila, and Nalanda were set up. Numerous women were enrolled in these educational temples, according to research. These colleges were very successful between the fifth and the thirteenth centuries. The Muslim kings of Delhi, Lucknow, and Allahabad founded universities in the eleventh century. However, it has been discovered that only a particular social class gets access to schooling.

Women Education in Medieval Period in India:

In medieval period in India, women's position was deteriorated in the society. Sati among some communities, child marriages and a ban on widow re- marriages became some communities of social life in India. There was a Debdasis who were sexually exploited by high societies. The multiple marriage system went on then like polygamy in Kshatriya society. In Muslim communities, women were restricted to zanana areas of the society. All of these evil practices were going on for the lack of proper education and non- education of the society in India.

In medieval India, patriarchal norms and societal structures heavily influenced the educational opportunities available to women. The prevailing belief in the inferiority of women and their primary role as homemakers meant that formal education was often deemed unnecessary for them. Instead, girls were typically trained in domestic duties such as cooking, sewing, and childcare from a young age. The practice of purdah, or seclusion of women, further limited their exposure to the

outside world and educational opportunities.

Furthermore, the prevalence of child marriage meant that many girls were married off at a young age, curtailing their chances of pursuing education. Once married, their responsibilities as wives and mothers took precedence over any aspirations for intellectual growth. Additionally, the hierarchical caste system and rigid social stratification meant that access to education was often restricted to privileged upper-caste women, further marginalizing those from lower castes and marginalized communities.

Though there was some women who took into some excelled in the place of politics, literature, religion, and education. Queen Sultana Razia who became the ruler of Delhi in India and many other women got administration of villages, town, social and religious institutions.

Women Education in Modern Indian Perspectives:

India's entire development greatly benefits from the education of its women. women's education in India gained momentum during the colonial era when social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocated for girls' education. The establishment of schools for girls and the promotion of female literacy became central to the nationalist agenda, with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi emphasizing the importance of educating women for nation-building. Despite the progress made since independence, women's education in modern India continues to face numerous challenges and barriers. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural norms often prioritize boys' education over girls'. Moreover, economic constraints, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate access to schools, especially in rural areas, impede girls' enrollment and retention in education.

However, amidst these challenges, women's education in modern India has made significant strides, catalyzing transformative change across various spheres. Education has empowered women to challenge traditional gender roles, assert their rights, and participate more actively in social, economic, and political life. Educated women are better equipped to make informed decisions about their health, family planning, and financial matters, leading to improved maternal and child outcomes. Education has emerged as a potent tool for economic empowerment, enabling women to gain access to employment opportunities, enhance their earning potential, and contribute to household incomes. Educated women are more likely to pursue higher education, acquire vocational skills, and enter non-traditional fields, thus narrowing the gender wage gap and fostering economic independence. Women's education has also contributed to broader social transformation, challenging discriminatory practices and fostering gender equality. Educated women are more likely to challenge oppressive customs such as child marriage, dowry, and gender-based violence, advocating for their rights and the rights of future generations. Moreover, educated mothers play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and values of their children, instilling principles of equality, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

It enhances the quality of life both within and outside the family, in addition to aiding in the development of half of human resources (Suguna, 2011). There are two major frameworks in the Indian education system: formal education and non-formal education. Other educational initiatives, like online and remote learning, have also been developed to encourage women to pursue higher education. Encouraging all girls to complete their education is the primary goal of the entire educational program. This low literacy rate indicates detrimental effects on women's lives, families, and the economic growth of the nation. Raising the educational attainment of women is, therefore, crucial. According to the HRD ministry's All India Survey on Higher Education report for 2015, there are an estimated 33.3 million Indians enrolled in higher education courses in India. In this, as of 2014–2015, there were 17.9 million males and 15.4 million girls. Gender equality, religious freedom, educational rights, cultural and educational rights, freedom from exploitation, and freedom are among the fundamental rights of women. It is well established that raising the educational attainment of girls positively affects young women's health and financial prospects, which benefits the community as a whole.

Women education is the most effective means of influencing social change. Inequalities are also lessened by education, which also helps people's standing within the family. The state developed schools, colleges, and universities that are solely for women in order to support women's education at all levels and to lessen gender prejudice in the dissemination of knowledge and education. In an effort to encourage more girls to pursue higher study, the government is offering a range of benefits, including free books, uniforms, housing and food, midday meal attire, scholarships, free circles, and more. Instruction for All of these programs along with numerous others, offer a variety of resources to improve women's education, making them extremely beneficial to raising the standard of education for girls in India.

If education, one of the key factors influencing cultural and moral standards, is left in the hands of traditionalists who hold a disjointed perspective of the nation's and the world's past, then a changing society and a developing economy will not be able to advance. As long as men and women have different degrees of education, the gaps in the roles that men and women play in society will not close or even go away. The main cause of our population's backwardness, particularly among women, is either a lack of education or inadequate education. The nation's literacy rate is lowered by women's poor literacy rates. In addition to the difference in literacy rates between the sexes, there is a difference in the enrolment of boys and girls at all educational levels. There are far fewer female students than male students at every level of education, from elementary school to university.

Education makes women more aware, which increases their participation in politics and ultimately strengthens democracy. They might organize to defend their rights. In the 1999 International Encyclopaedia of Women, several writers stress the importance of education in empowering women. According to Dominic and Jothi (2012), women's education is a crucial

component of any program aimed at empowering women, as work is a key factor in elevating the status of women in community. An important opportunity for India's social and economic development is created when an Indian woman receives an education.

An educated Indian woman will benefit society and the nation's economy, which will have a favourable effect on Indian society. A mom with more education lowers her child's risk of passing away before age five.

Government Initiatives and Policy Interventions: The Government of India has implemented various initiatives and policy interventions to promote women's education, including the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. These programs aim to enhance access to quality education, eliminate gender disparities, and ensure inclusive and equitable learning environments for all.

CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that people's views on women's education will play a significant role in illuminating how much they want their country to advance. As they say, educating a woman is like educating the entire society. Education is regarded as a vital tool for the empowerment of women. It alters their way of life, raises their social standing, increases their employment prospects, and makes it easier for them to engage in public life. Although there has been significant progress in literacy and education, the system as a whole still disadvantages women.

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